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AT THE GRAND JUNCTION.

I AM a bachelor, but not without people to take care of me, and, as I hope, to love me likewise. My nephew Dick does not, I believe, wish me dead, for the sake of the little property which he will then inherit ; not by right of entail—for I can leave my money to whomsoever I please—but by the better right of loving duty. He has been for many years a better son to me than most fathers can boast of ; and he is dearer to me than any other living creature, except—yes, except his wife. I think I like Niece Dick, as I call her, at least as well as I do her husband. I believe her tender care has kept me alive for years, as I am sure it has alone made life worth having ; for not only am I an invalid in respect of bodily health, but my mental organisation is morbidly sensitive and delicate. I need to be petted and made much of, as much as any Italian greyhound ; and I am sure I must sometimes be exacting enough to try the patience of an angel. Having confessed this much, let me premise that I am not ill-tempered, and that, so long as everything goes smooth with me, and just as I would have it (which Niece Dick generally manages shall be the case), I am really quite a pleasant old gentleman, very much enjoying all sorts of fun (short of practical jokes, for which, in my opinion, death should be the invariable penalty), and not even disliking children in their proper places. When they interrupt conversation, however, or are ill-behaved, I do not drink in pious silence, as Charles Lamb used to do, to the memory of King Herod, but demand in a loud voice that the little wretches shall be removed forthwith, and upon no account be readmitted to my august presence. But Nephew Dick's children and I are very good friends indeed, and never fall out, from the eldest, whom I have placed at Marlborough, where, Niece Dick assures me, he is doing his grand-uncle the greatest credit—down to the latest baby, aged six weeks.

We do not live together—Dick and I—because I have seen enough of life to know that the same roof should not shelter, for a permanency,

any other than a man's own family ; but we take our autumn excursion in company, and I do not think that the obligation at all lies upon their side because I pay all expenses. This holiday, almost as essential to the little folks as to myself, is not the only one that the state of my health requires ; and early in the present summer, I was ordered out of town as usual by my medical adviser. Only this time, there was something new the matter with me ; another spring had snapped of the poor rickety human machine, which I begin to think has almost done its work in this world, and another remedy had therefore to be applied. Country air was needed, but not the vacant quiet of the country ; I was to go where there was plenty of life ; I was to be where every modern appliance of luxury could be procured upon the instant ; where the sick man's impatient whim could be gratified before it became pining ; where I could get my Wenham Lake ice, as in London, with my seltzer and sherry ; where the salmon could be guaranteed to be as fresh as its accompanying cucumber (for I am not so ill but that I can eat) ; and where the *Times* should be found at the breakfast-table ready for ‘Uncle Grumpy,’ exactly as he was accustomed to find it in town.

‘Now, Dick,’ said I, ‘if I am to be surrounded with every luxury, it is certain that you and your wife must accompany me. I am sure that after what she has been going through lately with No. 9, she must want bracing and change of scene ; and as for you—we will go somewhere where you can run up to your bank and back every day ; and if you are a little late at your desk, I will make the matter right with old Ingots.’

‘But, my good sir, my wife can't leave No. 9 just at present,’ observed my nephew laughing : ‘the great principles of supply and demand are in the fullest operation.’

‘My dear boy,’ returned I quietly, ‘you seem to imagine that I myself was brought up on ass's milk. Of course, No. 9 and niece, Dick, cannot be separated.’

‘But the nurse?’ ejaculated young Paterfamilias. I confess I had forgotten the nurse, but, with

assumed indignation, I hastened to assure him that nothing necessary to his wife's comfort was likely to be omitted in my plan of proceedings. 'Teeza's delicate; let her take Teeza also—let's all be sick, and make the place a hospital. There will be four and a half of us, beside the baby. Write to the Grand Junction Hotel, Linesborough, and order rooms from Wednesday next.'

So nephew and niece Dick, with their little Theresa, and baby and nurse, left town with Uncle Grumpy.

For the combination of country and town life, there is nothing to equal the Grand Junction. It is within two hours of London, to and from which there are about three hundred trains per diem. There are four postal deliveries, and the newspaper arrives half an hour earlier than one gets it in London. Upon the other hand, it is in the heart of the country. It possesses a lawn and a rose-garden, equal to any belonging to a private gentleman's seat. Its cherry-pies are filled with the fruit of its own trees, and the cream therewith provided by its own cows; and while stale bread—that barbarity of the country—is avoided by the intervention of hot rolls, the honey at breakfast is the spoil of its own bee-hives. The window of every private sitting-room is made to look out upon verdure and foliage, and from those on the ground-floor you step at once upon the green-sward, and under the shelter of a spreading sycamore. Flowers are everywhere, not only upon the tables and sideboards, but clustered in every balcony, lining every verandah, and even swinging overhead in the air in baskets of wire, bedded with moss. But the great charm of the place is its garden: not only are there rustic seats disposed in every favourable spot—though never too near to permit the wished-for quiet of one party to be interrupted by the hilarity of another—but there are arbours, as different from those of a tea-garden as you can imagine, trellised with roses, and overhung with honeysuckle. The odour borne from these upon the cool night-air was something exquisite; and upon Sundays, the hearing was invariably ravished at the same period by the song of the nightingale, hidden within some leafy copse. I say upon Sundays, for on other nights the nightingales did not sing because of the railway-trains, of which no less than one hundred and eighty-five in the four-and-twenty hours passed the Grand Junction every week-day; and when I say passed it, I mean either touched it at a tangent, and flew off, north, south, or west, or more frequently touched *at* it, and disengaged passengers. This was the element of 'life' so strongly recommended by the Faculty; and certainly, if life be locomotion, we had plenty of it.

The excessive noise and bustle attendant upon each arrival and departure made the interval of repose inexpressibly calm and quiet. Sitting in the rose-garden amid the dreamy summer sounds—the coo of the pigeon (for we grew our own meat-pies), the sweep of the scythe, or the smack of the barge-rope as it struck the stream of the river that ran deep and stilly but a few hundred yards away, you suddenly were conscious of a distant tremor, a vibration in the warm blue air; then a rapid winnowing of the air, as though some gigantic bird with wings of seventy-eagle power were sweeping down upon our Eden; then a shaking of the solid earth, and especially of every wall and rafter of the Grand Junction Hotel, so that you

expected the waiters and the chambermaid to rush forth screaming, and the proprietor to wring his hands, and confess his extortions in prospect of the immediate doom; then thunder, as of a park of artillery; a tornado of dust, as though the whole Household Brigade were charging by; and then the winnowing and the distant tremor once more. But by the time you remarked that it was only the Up Express, your voice struck upon a leafy silence; the pigeon, and the scythe, and the barge-rope had all the space to themselves again, and you were deep in the golden age, when there was nothing but yellow post-chaises to get about in.

The terror, and afterwards the delight, of Teeza at these phenomena were both very pleasant for philosopher like myself to witness. At first, she hid her face in her mother's lap, and promised never to eat another lump of sugar unbeknown to her again; but very soon she lost her fear of the wicked Express—that Prince of the powers of the Air—and hung upon the garden railings, with her chin on the spikes, to watch as near as possible the flashing meteor, and held her little hand out for the sparks. Teeza was a great favourite at the Grand Junction, where children were rather infrequent guests: the waiters were never all so busy, although the hotel was quite full, but that one could spare a few moments to pluck her a cherry, or toss her ball across the lawn. The chambermaid kissed her whenever she got a chance, and even the little cookmaid inveigled her once into the kitchen, and let her help to shell the peas. As for the baby, it was the idol of the female inhabitants,* and excited their endless speculation as to how many days old it was, whether it had blue eyes or black, and whether I was its papa or its grandpapa; for my nephew went away by the early train to town every morning—his family invariably accompanying him to the platform, and bidding him adieu, as though he were bound for New Zealand—and Niece Dick and I were companions until he returned by the 7.30 to dinner; so that she and I were a problem to many people. It is astonishing what interest one takes in one's fellow-creatures in a place like the Grand Junction, where one has nothing else to do but observe his neighbours: I learned them for the first time how sweet is scandal, and what a relief it is to state one's worst suspicions of people. There was a very magnificent young lady in purple silk and Brussels lace, whose ears ought to have been the colour of beet-root, instead of the most delicate shell-pink (as they were), if being talked about makes the ears burn; and to see how all the other ladies whose position was less equivocal sailed by her, looking shotted guns, upon the lawn, was extremely edifying while it lasted, though it was afterwards discovered that she was a person of the first respectability, and indeed the wife of a dean.

I have hinted that the adieus of our party upon the platform were pathetic, but this was only at first, before we got used to parting; after a week or so, they became as cheerful as those of the three-score other wives and children who accompanied their bread-winners to the trains every morning, and gave them kisses, the domestic flavour of which I am afraid was in most cases obliterated by immediate tobacco; for the by-laws of the best regulated of railway companies do

* I cannot say so much for the males, when it lifted up its little voice in the night-season.

not apply to habitual passengers, and the calmness with which these lit their cigars under the very eyes of the officials was tremendous to a law-fearing nature—like my own. The welcome these reprobates received in the evening was also a very charming sight, and I would not have missed Nephew Dick's return even for the pleasure of retaining him with us all day. It was an incident, and we rather wanted incidents at the Grand Junction. Everything else we could obtain by merely touching a bell; and whatever we got for the asking, conferred a favour instead of incurring an obligation.

'We will have some champagne to-day, waiter.'

'Just so, sir.'

'And well iced.'

'Cert'nly, sir.'

'And be sure, waiter, that at dessert, we have plenty of cream with our strawberries.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Could anything be pleasanter than this? Did it not seem to realise the highest dream of the Optimist? Was it not exactly the thing that is so often preached, and (alas!) so seldom practised? Nay, putting the matter upon even lower grounds, is it not rather nice to feel certain that economy is of no use; that whether you have much or little, or good or bad, it makes scarcely any difference in what you will have to pay. You may therefore just as well enjoy yourself, and partake (in considerable quantities) of the very best. Above all, never distress yourself with speculations about the amount of the bill, for the most acute intelligence cannot detract from it the price of a bottle of ginger-beer. I have always had a tender sympathy with that young gentleman, whom Nature had evidently designed for a person of property, although omitting to dower him with material wealth, who stayed at some hospitable spot like this for weeks, eating and drinking whatever his expensive tastes suggested, and occupying an excellent private sitting-room, with only just money enough to pay for his washing—an item for which he scrupulously settled. What an enviable nature must he have had, if, as the story runs, he was never disturbed by the thought of the inexorable morrow which sooner or later must needs dawn upon him—by the idea of the dark cloud of pecuniary obligation swelling hour by hour to burst at last over his head. How could he return so pleasantly those smiles of the landlady, those civilities of the waiter, or receive the affable local information with which he was favoured by the fly-drivers (for he employed numbers of carriages), knowing that all these things were obtained under false pretences? He never permitted a doubt of his solvency to be entertained; never suffered a sinew of the decorous respect in which he was held to be relaxed; but at his own good time himself revealed that he had not a shilling in the world. A mere swindler would have remained as long as he could, and exposed himself to degradation; but this gentleman was incapable of putting himself into such a false position. The last order which he ever issued (said to have been given after a dinner of unusual splendour, even for him) was, '*Fetch a policeman,*' and it appears to me to possess, in spite of its abruptness, both Grandeur and Pathos. The '*Tête d'armée*' of the first Napoleon, when his career of universal spoliation was ending, is vastly inferior.

We had no such interesting person at the Grand Junction as this; and indeed it would have been

too exciting for my complaint. Niece Dick and I were both wonderfully bettered by our stay there; and on the last evening, as we strolled as usual upon the lawn, and watched the red lights glimmer and grow, and then the Up Express sweep by with its occupants, my heart felt quite a pang to know that we were all going that self-same way upon the morrow.

THE WILDS OF ARABIA.

THE Isthmus of Suez is one of the most interesting places on the face of the beautiful and mysterious earth, of whose beauty mankind is daily growing more enamoured, and whose mystery is rapidly lessening before the intrepid advance of learning, zeal, and adventure. Most sacred and majestic are the associations connected with the junction between the continents of Asia and Africa, and full of sublime and wonderful memories are the lands that lie to the south of Suez, divided by the sullen surface of the Red Sea. Egypt, with its awful antiquity, its half-unravelled story, before which the mind stands still, bewildered, in the attempt to travel back along the stream of time; and Arabia, the treasure-land of history and romance—the marvellous peninsula, within whose boundaries are Mount Sinai and the places sacred to the false Prophet; the unknown burial-place of Moses, and the tomb of Mohammed, over whose sands the Messiah passed, an infant in his mother's arms, when they took the young child into Egypt, by the way that the Israelites had come from the sway of Pharaoh; or whose borders is Jerusalem. Glance along the Arabian coast, as it is marked on Mr Palgrave's map, and what a fast-thronging crowd of associations spring up in the track of the names which are so strange and ancient. From the wells of Ma'an to the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, which remind one of Sindbad, and thus become for a moment pleasantly familiar, to the long-stretching coast of the 'frankincense country'—a term which is a poem in a word—to the Sea of Oman, beneath whose 'blue waters' Hindoo sleeps, all is strange, and mystical, and dreamy. Here is an immense country, which has played a great part in the history of the world—the centre of that faith which has ever been Christianity's most formidable rival—the scene of those wondrous, patient pilgrimages which are the most extraordinary manifestations of faith and fanaticism the world has to shew. Thousands of our countrymen sail along its coasts yearly; one of its towns is a British shipping-port to all intents and purposes. How much do we know about this ancient and romantic country, beyond the old generalisations of the geographers, who wrote of Arabia Felix and Arabia Petraea, and the scant definitions and border explorations of travellers within our own time? So little, that Mr Palgrave's book* is more like a revelation than a narrative; and it lays a strong, an irresistible hold upon the imagination, carrying away the reader, as a Djirm or an Afreet might have done, in those immortal stories which are at once the most impossible and the truest that ever have been told.

To explore the Arabian peninsula, to fill up the blank in the map of Asia which meets the eye,

* Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia, by William Gifford Palgrave. London: Macmillan.

when we look beyond the fringe of names along the Arabian coast, and baffles the mind which questions of these places and their people, to seek for the civilisation or the barbarism that brings the dwellers in the unknown lands nearer to us, or places them further away—these were the purposes with which Mr Palgrave and his comrade, a Celos-Syrian, and their Arab guides and fellow-travellers, took their way through the eastern gate of Ma'an, and set their faces towards the desert. ‘We will traverse the land before us in its fullest breadth, and know what it contains from shore to shore, or it shall be our tomb.’ So said the traveller who purposed to do this great thing in the guise of a physician; and he kept his word. We cannot find the Djowf, or nearest-inhabited district of Central Arabia, whither they were first bound, upon any ordinary map; and there is no better means of comprehending and estimating the great task thus undertaken, and its result, than by placing Mr Black’s map of Arabia and Mr Palgrave’s side by side, and tracing on the latter the indications which break up the dead-level of the former, over the wide space marked merely ‘The Syrian Desert.’ For two hundred miles the way lay before the travellers, a wide and level plain, blackened with pebbles of basalt and flint, and the track indicated by irregularly-placed wells. Gloom and silence are the accompaniments of journeying in the desert, and in gloom and silence their way-faring began, as the camels stretched their long necks and sped onwards with noiseless and ungainly celerity. There is a great deal of monotony in the desert; and in journeying in waste places, privation and disguise; danger and suffering, must always be taken into account. They are to be found in plenty in Mr Palgrave’s narrative of his travel through the dreary land, where for a while the blue range of Serhan was visible; but soon it sank beneath the horizon, and left nothing but the plain and its mirages, the great oppressive solitude, in which even the face of an enemy had been welcome, and the sight of the jerboa was a pleasure.

The Bedouins who wander in this wide space, called the Syrian Desert, are very different from the poetical and polite pictures of them which we are accustomed to draw, from associations compounded probably of *The Talisman* and a pretty poem that everybody has learned in his early days, called *The Arab to his Steed*. One learns very soon that Arab steeds are ugly and vicious; and now Mr Palgrave requires us to part with our illusions about the Arabs themselves; not the civilised Arabs of inhabited lands and organised governments—Mr Palgrave holds them up to admiration as ‘one of the noblest races of earth’—but the Bedouins, of whose morals, manners, appearance, and condition he gives a deplorable description. He contends for an innate nobility in these people, though it be so overwhelmed by the hopeless degradation of their state, but, after all, what is this life? Can any imagination elevate or poetry lend it a charm? To drive camels about on open wastes, to have no laws, no religion, no instruction, no idea or sense of moral obligation, no comprehension of beauty, love, fidelity, or purity: to be always in danger, to suffer unceasing privation, never to know security—such is the life of the Bedouin; and shall we go to the desert to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles? The unmixed clans of Central and Eastern Arabia offer a splendid contrast to their pitiable step-brethren the nomade

Bedouins. The mock-physician did not practise much among the tribes, having been informed that to doctor a Bedouin or a camel is equally useless; but, arrived at the Djowf, he set up in business at once. His companion, who passed as his brother-in-law, played the part of a merchant. There was necessarily more or less risk in these assumptions, but the danger incurred was trifling in comparison with that in which M. Vambery placed himself in his wonderful journey. There was no deception about religion; the travellers were known, recognised, and unmolested as Christians.

The Djowf is a large province, hitherto entirely unknown to us, and occupying a portion of what we have been accustomed to call ‘the desert.’ It has Medina on one side, and Zulphab, the great commercial door of Eastern Nejd, on the other. Here is an important filling up of a blank space, for the Djowf is a fine prosperous province, and its people worthy of note, and of the space Mr Palgrave allows them; and here we first become aware of the existence of a great city, whence the Djowf is governed, lying beyond the sand-passes, which the Arabs call Nefood, or Daughters of the Desert, and ruled by a remarkable personage, a true king of men, whose name is Telal. Discovery is advancing so rapidly, that we are no longer astonished when ‘some new thing’ is told us of such magnitude that it gives birth to countless new ideas, views, speculations, hopes; but though surprise be lessened, pleasure remains undimmed, unchilled. The heavens have added a new verse to the song they have been singing in men’s ears since the morning of the world, and tell them now of a whole system of stars, which have hitherto been hidden from men’s eyes. The labours of the famous discoverer of the source of the sacred Nile have been supplemented by the finding of another world of waters in the innermost recesses of the African continent. These are wonderful things to think of, but their majesty and beauty are those of the lonely grandeur of nature, slowly revealing herself to man. In the discoveries which Mr Palgrave relates, there is an element of strong human interest, if less sublime, even more engrossing. Beyond the barrier, where the Daughters of the Desert stretch their broad red arms to deter the traveller, he penetrated, and tells us of a great city, a vast, enlightened, and successful system of government; a powerful sovereign, in advance of his time and his people; a mode of life in which the mind finds much to charm and interest; yet a people to whom we and our powers, our influence, our ambition, our habits, and our faith are entirely unknown.

Mr Palgrave traces the history of the tribe of Tai back to the fifth century of our era, in a rapid sketch, which has the brilliancy of a picture, and the attraction of a romance. The grandeur, the brilliancy, and the romance of that history are contained in the person of Telal, a prince of an ideal perfection. ‘Affable towards the common people, reserved and haughty with the aristocracy, courageous and skilful in war, a lover of commerce and building in time of peace, liberal even to profusion, yet always careful to maintain and augment the state revenue, neither overstrict nor yet scandalously lax in religion, secret in his designs, but never known to break a promise once given, or violate a plighted faith, he offers the very type of what an Arab prince should

be' Under the auspices, and enjoying the personal friendship of this Arthur among Arabs, the pretended doctor and merchant lived a pleasant life at Hayel, a city for whose site we shall search our maps in vain, but which we find in Mr Palgrave's, far north of Shakra. It is amusing to find the *esprit de corps* existing so strongly, even where the commission is self-conferred; and the author's detailed account of the practice of medicine among the Arabs, and the absurdities of fatalist doctrines in connection with it, is a remarkably agreeable section of his book. Much depended on Telal's friendship and fidelity to the travellers, whom he verily believed to be Syrians, though he very soon detected that they had ulterior objects than those they professed. He acted kindly, courteously, and, on the whole, honourably; but he had them closely watched, which, indeed, was a matter of course, for even the model court of Hayel could not be expected to breathe any atmosphere but the oriental one of suspicion. They had a dangerous enemy in Obeyd, the uncle of Telal, a ferocious true believer, who considered Telal a lost latitudinarian, and followed the example of Mohammed as zealously as he preached his doctrine. This engaging gentleman would have harmed the travellers seriously had Telal been less stanch, and, above all, less adroit; his nephew knew he never could resist an opportunity for killing Bedouins; and when the time secretly arranged for the departure of his Christian friends drew near, he sent the fierce fanatic to command some of the Faithful who were keeping the pilgrim-road to Medina clear of marauders. Obeyd took leave of the travellers with suspicious cordiality, and informed them that, having learned that they were going to Riad, he had written a letter to his friend Abd'Allah, the son of Feysul, of which they were to be the bearers, and that if they journeyed to Nejed, they would meet a sincere friend in Abd'Allah. This letter was carefully folded and elaborately sealed; nevertheless, the sagacious *hakeem* opened it, and read as follows: 'In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate, we, Obeyd-ebn-Rasheed, salute you, O Abd'Allah, son of Feysulebn-Sa'ood; and peace be on you, and the mercy of God, and His blessings. We inform you that the bearers of this are one Seleem-el-Eys, and his comrade Barakat-esh-Shamee, who give themselves out for having some knowledge in—here followed a word of equivocal import, capable of interpretation alike by 'medicine' or 'magic,' but generally used in Nejed for the latter, which is at Riad a capital crime. 'Now, may God forbid that we should hear of any evil having befallen you. We salute your father Feysul, and anxiously await your news in answer. Peace be with you!'

Telal acted kindly and cautiously, and plainly let them see that he regarded their onward journey as not a little dangerous—an apprehension justified by the result. Mr Palgrave accounts for the risks they ran, and the strange enmities they aroused, by a curious and elaborate account of the sectarian differences which divide the Mohammedan world, and which rage with such violence in Central Arabia, that the travellers must have been constantly reminded of home. Their last achievement at Hayel was the cure of Telal's son, Bedr; and then they departed, passing through the western portal of the city at sunrise on the 8th September 1862, and once more setting their faces toward the inexorable desert.

It was a motley party which encamped that night at the southerly verge of Djebel Shomer, twenty-eight in number, including a half-cracked runaway negro and two women. They halted in a grassy spot by a spring—'the diamond of the desert'—and they ate dates and unleavened bread, while the full-moon shone upon the level plain as upon the wide sea. The history of one day is the history of all, diversified by skirmishes more or less frequent and serious with the Bedouins, and marked, on the part of the European travellers, by close and constant study of the natural features of the country. In the morning, a halt for coffee-making, but no approach to a real meal—that is reserved for the evening—when village hospitalities are bestowed on the wayfarer; then on and on, through high grounds and pasture-lands, through sandy river-like valleys, with glimpses of faint blue peaks afar off; but by no high mountains, no rivers, lakes, or streams, with a fresh breeze blowing, and the sun shining brightly, the birds twittering, and long files of gazelles bounding away at their approach. So to Bereydah, close to which city they pass an encampment of Indo-Persian pilgrims, and learn a horrible story of treachery and cruelty practised towards a similar caravan, who, in 1856, were led out into the desert by a worthy son of the governor, Mohana, and there abandoned, and left to die of famine and thirst. Their sojourn at Bereydah is less interesting than that at Hayel, for it shews us no one to compare with Telal; but we follow their track with great interest, when they once more resume their wild way, and pursue it to Riad, the main object of their long journey, the capital of Nejed and half Arabia, 'its very heart of hearts.'

The capital of Nejed is so far like Paris, that it swarms with soldiers, and that its principal building is the palace of its ruler. Mr Palgrave describes the city, its people, and their ways so minutely, that we lose sight and sense of the distance, and the utter strangeness of the place, and read the pages with as much ease as though they told of haunts familiar to ordinary Europeans, and so to us. It is wonderful to contemplate his familiarity with these things, and to remember how short was the time at his disposal in which to study them, and with what obstacles of jealousy, hypocrisy, suspicion, and intrigue his path was beset. He learned to understand even the smallest details of the political intrigues for ever going on, to appreciate the characters and qualities of all those concerned, to discern the proportions of contending interests, to comprehend and conform to the habits and prejudices of the people, and, most difficult of all, to seize upon the points of sectarian religious difference, and correctly estimate their practical importance. It is impossible that any man, for any purpose, in any place, can have made better use of his time than did the mock medicine-man, after he had successfully 'begged of God, and secondly of Feysul, permission to exercise in the town his medical profession, under the protection of God, and secondly of Feysul.' Herein, it will be seen, as Mr Palgrave remarks, that he observed the true Dogberryian order of precedence. The sojourn in Riad must have been unpleasant as well as unsafe, for religious fanaticism is rampant there, and the mere sight of persecution, carried on after the fashion of the 'Zelators,' must have been trying. They had plenty to do, however, and the account of their mode of life is very interesting. Their

patients were numerous and important ; they were in high favour at the palace (where they did *not* present Obeyd's letter to the son of Feysul) ; and they acquired perfect insight into court intrigues, and heard an amazing quantity of back-stairs gossip. Mr Palgrave writes of the Wahabee dynasty as learnedly as Mr Carlyle of the Hohenzollerns, and as familiarly as Dr Doran of the queens of the House of Hanover.

When they had been some time at Riad, the cloud as big as a man's hand appeared in the smiling sky of their fortunes, and soon deepened, darkened, and widened into a fierce and deadly outpouring of wrath and hate. Abd'Allah found them out, and determined to bar the exit from Riad against them by one of two methods, equally ingenious and effective—death or marriage. He resorted to the latter, making the most liberal offers ; but they parried the attack by a proposal to carry out their previous arrangements for going to Hasa, and returning to Riad in the spring, when the gallant chief himself would have come back from a military expedition then about to commence. Abd'Allah was too deceitful to be easily deceived, but sufficiently cunning to pretend to be taken in ; so he affected satisfaction, and turned his attention to murder. The intended victim, in the first instance, was to have been his half-brother, between whom and himself a fierce feud raged, in which all the nobles ranged themselves on the one side or the other ; and he first endeavoured to coax, and then commanded the pretended physician to furnish him with strychnine, of the efficacy of which, as a poison of singular force and simplicity, he had heard favourable reports. When Mr Palgrave not only refused to obey, but told Abd'Allah that he knew what he wanted the strychnine for, his residence at Riad became decidedly perilous ; and there can be no doubt that his own dauntless daring, his open and resolute defiance of the unscrupulous wretch, and his ready exposition of the infamy that must attend such a breach of the Arab laws of hospitality as would be involved in any injury to his father's guests, alone saved him and his companion from destruction. He left the villain's presence unaccompanied, and made instant but secret preparations for departure. All was bustle and business at the palace, for the expedition to Onezyah was just setting out, and the two strangers apparently pursued their usual avocations, and were unnoticed. Their camels had been housed, fed, and laden by their loyal attendant ; and one night, when the Faithful had been called to evening-prayer, and the gate was open and unwatched, the travellers crossed its threshold, and, favoured by the rapidly-flitting twilight, reached the shelter of the long low hills. There they lighted their camp-fire and their pipes, drank their coffee, and laughed at Feysul and Abd'Allah.

Once more they are in the desert, and this time it is the Dahnâ, the terrible 'red desert,' which spreads around them, widening out and out, like waves of a land-ocean, with distant white glimmerings of spectral sand-hills, but no track, no indication that man and beast are wont to journey over its expanse ; for this is that dread waste at which even the wandering Bedouin trembles ; where the light sands are tossed by the capricious breezes into hills and dales, on which no trace remains, the route and the grave combined, in many and many an instance. This is the 'red desert,' which all travellers who pass between 'the populous Hasa

and the imperial Nejd' must cross, amid intense heat, and glaring light, and torturing thirst, the awful solitude, and the uncertainty of the shifting surface. The caravan encountered all these dangers, endured all these sufferings ; and at length, when Hofhoof, their destined goal, was yet fifteen miles away, the ground became firm under the feet of the dromedaries, and the desert of Central Arabia lay behind them for ever. Their last experience of the wilderness was a memorable one, for they came upon a vast swarm of locusts, which the Arabs devoured with frantic eagerness, with almost insane joy. The life at Hofhoof, where the travellers made the most of Feyusal's kindness, and prudently suppressed the circumstances of their departure from Riad ; the journey through Hasa with the grand ruins of the old Carmathian royalty ; ruins which caused the Cteso-Syrian to observe : 'Those who built this must have been much more civilised than its present occupants ;' the dull life of the Nejdeen garrison ; the terrible longing of the men for their distant homes ; all delightfully told, bring us, with the travellers, to the welcome shore, where they take ship for the Moharrek, having traversed the mysterious Arabian peninsula from Gaza to Kafet.

Mr Palgrave journeyed much further than this brief sketch can follow him. The unknown shores of the Persian Gulf, the romantic coasts of the kingdom of Oman, revealed themselves to his searching investigation. He crossed the deep water to Ormuz, land of pearls, and much sung by poets who know nothing about it ; and having undergone shipwreck and fever, in addition to the inevitable sufferings of such a journey, he embarked at Muscat, on the 22d March 1864, and, after renewed illness, and in a state of utter prostration, was taken to Basrah, and up the Tigris to Bagdad. His homeward route was by Kerkoor, Mosul, Mardeen, Diarbekir, Orfah, and thence round to Aleppo and Syria. Mr Palgrave takes it for granted that every one knows all about these comparatively accessible places ; nevertheless, anything he may find to say concerning them could not fail to be acceptable. If it be not unequalled, the book which tells the world the story of the countries, the men, and the systems which exist between Ma'an and Muscat, is at least unsurpassed in the literature of travel.

THE CLYFFARDS OF CLYFFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,' &c.

CHAPTER XXL.—INTERCEPTED.

PALE and haggard from her almost sleepless night, arose Mildred Hepburn, and wrote her note in-secret, and despatched it to the coast-guard station by a trusty hand. The elements which had denied her rest were now at amity. The rain was over and gone ; the winds were whistling carelessly enough their favourite tune, *Over the Hills and far away* ; and the dark clouds, scattered and bleached, were hurrying over a bright blue sky. Even the sea wore a smile upon its lips, still white with wrath, and strove to look as though its great green waves were only at play, which were tossing about for leagues upon their crests the fragments of men's floating homes, and not far down, their drowned and mangled limbs. There are storms of course in daytime, but the Wind loves the Night, and under her black wing more often works its

malice than in the day. The sunshine, like a healthy public opinion among men, seems somewhat to restrain it. Upon this April morning, at all events, it shewed no trace of malign fury, but seemed to delight in practical jokes, such as whirling the white pigeons of Sandby Farm (which considered itself inland) in twice as many circles as their own spiral habits would have suggested, and so bewildering them with the speed thereof, that they scarcely knew themselves from gulls; also meeting with the round hat of Mr Walter Dickson, mariner, stuck on merely as it seemed by capillary attraction to the extreme back of his head, it tossed it hither and thither, and 'skied' it, and rolled it, and 'chivied' it like a good-natured mob at a fair; and not like a blood-thirsty rabble greedy for rapine and ruin, as had been its behaviour but a few hours before.

Nevertheless, these high-spirited proceedings of the zephyrs were far from relished by Mr Dickson, not too well pleased, in the first place, with his appointment of special messenger to Mrs Hepburn, since it involved his visiting the coast-guard station: he would have done anything in the world for *her*, and indeed he was doing even this; but it is impossible for any gentleman who trades in lace and owns a vessel with a false bottom to perform service with cheerfulness which brings him into personal contact with the guardians of the revenue. No one with any feeling would select from among all his acquaintances a notorious pickpocket, or even a receiver of stolen goods, to go on an errand for him to the sitting magistrate at Bow Street; nor would Mrs Hepburn have employed Walter Dickson on this particular mission if she could have helped it. But, in the first place, he was her nearest neighbour, and there was no time to spare, since Mr Stevens was expected very early; and in the next place, the objection of being connected, openly or secretly, with the contraband trade, lay against every man, woman, and child in Sandby, who looked upon French brandy and Brussels lace as productions of their own labour, and upon a coast-guardsman as the interloping foreigner. The high tariff of import duties in those days was certainly an example of a Law but for which many men would have been free from sin; like the game-laws of to-day, it begat, as its immediate effects, treacheries, blood-shedding, murders, as well as indirectly producing a general lawlessness—a hatred of all laws as tyrannies. The ill-feeling thus engendered between the governed and their governors manifested itself with greatest intensity, of course, in its first stage; that is, between the actual violators of the obnoxious law and the parties whose duty it was to uphold it. A smuggler would behave towards a coast-guardsman as he would behave to nobody else who was his enemy. Sandby men, who had wives and children of their own, to whom they hoped God would be merciful, by preserving to them their bread-winner, had made women widows and children orphans in that little colony at Lucky Bay before now with but small scruple. Even on a windy night, it was not probable that a blue-jacket so used to the cliff as Robert Deans, for instance, should have been *blown over it*; which happened in January last, during a dead calm, and, by a curious coincidence, on the very night when a large cargo was known to have been run within half a mile of the spot: or even granting so much out of an abundant charity, William Boyce, another

guardian of the revenue, could scarcely have dug that pit on the sea-shore for *himself*, in which he was found dead one winter's morning, with only his head above the shingle.

Nor is it to be supposed that all the cruelty was exercised upon one side. There were men at Lucky Bay ready to slash with their cutlasses upon very slight provocation, and who looked upon a Guernsey shirt as a very pretty mark for a pistol-bullet. Worst of all, perhaps, informers infested the neighbourhood, and sowed suspicion everywhere, making bad blood even, where it should have flowed most purely, in the veins of kinmen. Writers who are not practically acquainted with troubles of this sort generally fall into the error, when describing them, that notwithstanding all crimes or vices which may be generated by such a state of things, the courtesies of life, the ordinary relations of man and man, go on pretty much the same as under more favourable circumstances. But this is far from being the case. No war is carried on with that distinguished politeness which it presents in the cream-laid pages of the historian, and civil war least of all. When coast-guardsman and smuggler met one another in the neighbourhood, incidentally and during what I may call the intervals of business, they did not give one another 'good-day': if they spoke at all, they consigned each other's eyes and limbs to everlasting perdition. Even when engaged upon a lawful calling like the present, Mr Walter Dickson fully expected the roughest of receptions at Lucky Bay. A perceptible stiffness seizes the most affable of medical practitioners, when a homeopathist enters the same room; a county magistrate addresses a poacher, even non-officially, in tones which he generally uses towards the Canine world rather than the Human; and I think I have seen a clergyman of the Established Church turn almost livid when brought into connection with Baptists. Similarly, Lieutenant Carey, although a most capital fellow, was by no means rose-water to the enemies of the Revenue. Moreover, as I have said, there was just now a rumour afloat of some great robbery (as *he* considered it) to be presently committed upon his majesty's customs in those parts, and it was not wholly out of the range of probability that he might suspect Mr Dickson of having lent his lug to the Tempter on this occasion, as he had often been known to lend his lugger.

Altogether, if commissioners had been an institution of those times, and Mr Dickson had happened to find one waiting for an errand in so unpromising a thoroughfare as that between Sandby and Lucky Bay, he would have preferred to hand over the handsome guerdon which Mrs Hepburn had given him for his trouble, as well as something out of his own pocket, to get this letter taken to Mrs Carey by other hands. He did not, indeed, find a commissioner, but he found Mr Stevens, who had strolled out with a cigar (and a spy-glass) before breakfast, a quarter of a mile or so on the Sandby side of the Look-out Station. Perhaps we shall not go far wrong in supposing that from that post of espial he had seen Mr Dickson coming, and had purposely gone to meet him.

'A fine fresh morning, my good fellow,' observed this gentleman carelessly. 'Was there much damage done at your place by last night's storm?'

'Not as I knows on,' replied the messenger gruffly; 'but the fact is, I came away before my eyes were well open; for the wind kept me awake

with blowing the shingle off my roof, and when I should have had my snooze this morning, I got this to carry to the preventive station ;' and he held out the letter to Mr Carey at arm's-length, as a man does who has got a material grievance to expatiate upon.

' Well, as far as that goes,' rejoined the stranger, ' I can save you the rest of the walk, and welcome, as I am the guest of Lieutenant Carey at present, and am going back to his house at once to breakfast.

' Well, you see, it's got "Private" written upon it,' observed Mr Walter Dickson indecisively ; ' and yet—here he scratched his head with extraordinary vehemence—' I have no great fancy for putting my head into that there hive yonder, even to deliver a letter, and that's the truth. But I ask your pardon, sir ; perhaps you may belong to them blessed "Bluebottles?"'

' Not I, my friend,' rejoined the stranger laughing ; ' the very cigar I am smoking came to my lips free of the Custom-house. I am only here to look at some of your sea-sights—the Mermaid Cavern, and so on. I came, too, recommended by mine host of the *Crown*—here he sank his voice, and looked cautiously about him—' which should be a passport—should it not ?—to all free-traders.'

' Perhaps it should, and perhaps it should not,' returned the other warily. ' The coast-guard station is a queer place for an honest man to put up at : the rat doesn't trust the dog, you know, that lies in the same basket with the cat.'

' And yet, if he offered the use of his teeth to carry a letter,' laughed the stranger, ' I should think even the most cautious of rats might accept that service. By all means, carry it yourself, however, if you think it right to do so, although I should have thought that the word "Private" referred rather to the contents of the letter than to any particular hand by which it was to be delivered.'

' Ay, that's true enough, master, surely ; and if you're going to breakfast with the lieutenant and his wife, it's like you'll have an earlier opportunity of giving her this here than I, for them Bluebottles is sartin to keep me hanging about, and listening to their sauce, instead of taking in the letter direct.'

' Very good,' observed Mr Stevens, quietly pocketing the note ; ' I will see that Mrs Carey gets it at once.'

He nodded carelessly, and turning upon his heel, sauntered back in the direction of the preventive station ; while Mr Dickson, not displeased at having been spared the most unpleasant portion of his errand, walked hastily Sandby-ways, without once looking behind him. If he had entertained any suspicion of Mr Stevens as a letter-carrier, and had kept his eyes turned westward for a few minutes, he would have remarked that that gentleman was a considerable time emerging from the little thicket which lay between him and the Look-out ; this interval was spent in a manner which few besides the late Sir James Graham could have conscientiously commended. Nothing was easier than to untwist the little note, which had neither seal nor fastening of any kind except that moral one conveyed by its superscription, ' Private,' and the contents were his own (appropriation) in half a minute.

DEAREST MRS CAREY.—Pray beseech the lieutenant to accompany Mr Stevens and my husband in their walk this morning. This is a very silly request, I know ; and yet I think you will grant

it, even without having a reason assigned by Yours affectionately, MILDRED HEPBURN.
Mr Stevens folded up the letter as before, and placed it in his waistcoat pocket, with an unpleasant smile. ' No, Mrs Raymond—Hepburn,' soliloquised he slowly, ' I don't think that plan will suit me. Two is company—for a little way—but three is none. What a very fortunate thing that I was at the Look-out, and thereby able to anticipate this new arrangement !'

Mr Stevens had not been the only person among the Figure-heads that morning. Early as it was, Mrs Carey had stepped out there with the intention of telling her guest that the tea was 'made,' and had been an unseen witness to the interview between him and Dickson. This so greatly strengthened her suspicions of his connection with the smuggling interest, that she ventured to confide them to her husband. But from an inspector of coast-guard stations to a sort of polite Will Watch, was too many points for the opinion of the lieutenant to veer round all in a hurry. He had only begun to admit the possibility of Mr Stevens not being a direct emissary of the Admiralty, when the object of their discussion appeared coming up the little garden.

' Let us see whether he mentions having seen Dickson,' said Mrs Carey hurriedly, and the next moment their guest was seated at the breakfast-table. Not a word did he utter about any such meeting, and very little about anything else : ever and anon, Mrs Carey shot a glance of significance at her husband, as much as to say : ' Did I not tell you so ?' but the conversation languished. It was felt a relief by everybody when the meal was finished, although the host had something of embarrassment to endure still, when Mr Stevens observed : ' Come, lieutenant, if you cannot be my companion for a longer walk, you will, at least, accompany me half-way to Sandby.' And poor Mr Carey dared not say 'No,' albeit he was burning to have his talk out with his spouse concerning the character and intentions of this inexplicable person ; nor was Mr Stevens satisfied even with dragging him half-way, but compelled him to accompany him to the height corresponding to the Look-out, upon the Sandby side of the bay. There, in sight of Pampas Cottage, the stranger struck his forehead theatrically. ' Upon my life, Mr Carey,' cried he, ' I believe I might just as well wear a turnip as this head of mine. I have clean forgotten a letter which a messenger from Mrs Hepburn intrusted to me this very morning to give to your wife's hands. But stay ; I don't think you must open it, for you see it is marked "Private." I won't detain you another moment ; pray, take it back at once, and make my humblest apologies ; pray, do—pray, do !'

Mrs Hepburn, watching in the little garden, had beheld with a grateful heart the appearance of the lieutenant with his guest upon the western hill-top ; and her disappointment was extreme when she now saw the former shake hands with his companion with the evident intention of returning. She even beckoned to him with her hand to come on ; but although he took off his hat, in token that he saw her, he only shook his head emphatically, and walked rapidly away homeward.

CHAPTER XXII.—BESIDE THE BEACON.

Mr Stevens pursued his way to Pampas Cottage, and as he waited for the servant to answer the

bell, pulled out his watch somewhat ostentatiously, as though he would observe: 'I am a punctual man; I trust I shall not have to wait.' Mrs Hepburn had withdrawn within doors, but he was well aware that this piece of pantomime could not be lost upon her or on anybody else who chanced to be in the down-stairs' sitting-room; and when he was admitted, he took his umbrella in with him, as one who has come not to make a call, but to take a walk, and who expects to start immediately. He had his reasons for not wishing to waste time; while poor Mildred, who was quite overwhelmed by what seemed the desertion of the lieutenant, did not know that she had any interest in delaying his departure. Not five minutes elapsed, therefore, before Raymond and the stranger were climbing together the Down behind the cottage, and Mildred with her child in her arms was watching them, and fashioning with dumb white lips a prayer for her husband's safe return. At the top of the Down, he paused and turned, standing up against the horizon very distinctly. There he motioned to her a farewell, kissing his hand twice, once for her, and once for little Milly, as she well understood it, then vanished over the brow of the hill, while her own fingers were yet upon her lips. Mr Stevens lingered an instant behind him, and seemed to imitate her gesture, mockingly, like some malignant Spectre of the Brocken. She had promised to meet this man on the morrow at the Mermaid's Cavern, and be his guide homeward; yet she now feared nothing at his hand for herself, but everything for Raymond; and although she knew it not, she had good cause for fear.

The two men pushed swiftly on their way. There was not enough sympathy between them to make them slacken their pace for the convenience of conversation. They walked, rather, like the Alpine amateurs who walk for walking's sake, and about whom the professional guides they employ would, I should think, be very unwilling to express their own private opinion. When, however, they came to any remarkable spot, Raymond would pause, and courteously explain to his companion whatever of interest belonged to it. Their path lay almost always close to the verge of the chalk-cliffs; but every now and then a huge cleft, riven by some convulsion of nature, or worn away by the constant action of some little river, would compel a detour. These sheltered spots, wooded for the most part to the very verge of the ribbed sea-sand, were very lovely, but in the eyes of an inhabitant of the locality, their picturesqueness had but little claim upon his regard. They were all more or less used for smuggling purposes: not a boat lying up high and dry on the shore that tempestuous morning but had held at one time or another its foreign cargo—and about each there was a tale of adventure, and peril, and blood to be told, to which Mr Stevens seemed to lend an attentive ear. The Downs themselves, with many a velvet hollow, meet for the noiseless passage of the cloud-shadows, or with tiny dingles, dotted with gorse, and shaggy with thorn, were by no means without their story. More than once, the wayfarers would come upon the 'barrows,' or burial-places, of the long-forgotten dead—some rifled of their contents by brutal curiosity, but others still intact, with the same earth upon the mouldering bones which Briton or Saxon, centuries ago, had placed with pious hands above their dead. These tumuli were invariably upon some lofty ridge, as though the dying wish of

those beneath them had been to be laid within the spot from which their homes, and fields, and all the little world which they had known in life, could best be seen.

Some observation of this sort Raymond made; but his companion only shrugged his shoulders, not seeming to appreciate antiquities, or the reflections arising therefrom, so much as the tales about 'Will Watch.' 'What does it matter, when a man is dead,' observed he roughly, 'where his bones are put to?'

'Very true,' replied Raymond. 'Still, one has a fancy in these matters. One would not like to lie unburied, for instance, with one's bones picked by obscene birds, and whitening on a desert; or in the depths of ocean, tossing about with shell and sea-weed, and sucked by the cold lips of toothless fish.'

'You are fastidious, Mr Hepburn,' responded the stranger, hammering at the rounded turf with irreverent heel.

'If it be so to prefer land to water for a last resting-place, I am,' returned Raymond. 'It is, as I have said, but fancy. Still, I would like to be laid where my wife and child could come to look upon the earth which to them at least would be sacred; nay, like these ancestors of ours, I confess I would rather find my last home where all the scenes around had been familiar to me during life.'

'We have not all that choice,' observed Mr Stevens coldly.

'Nice, agreeable, cheerful companion this,' said Raymond to himself: 'I hope he is not going to tire himself by walking with me too far.'

Almost immediately, and as though in answer to this unexpressed thought, Mr Stevens stopped; he did not, however, hold out his hand to say Good-bye; he pointed with it to a dark object looming upon a crest of down far in advance. 'Why, what is that?' he muttered. 'It looks like a—like a gallows!'

So haggard, so wild, and yet so menacing was the stranger's appearance as he made this inquiry, that Raymond might aptly have retorted: 'And you look like a gallows-bird.' But he only answered smiling: 'For one who has no foolish fancies such as we were speaking of but now, you seem strangely moved by Marmouth Beacon. It is certainly black, and it is made of timber, but I never knew it taken for a gallows before. A beacon has stood, in some shape or another, on that promontory, which is one of the highest cliffs in the south country, for perhaps a thousand years. In the middle ages, it flashed forth its warning far and near, whenever an invader threatened; it did good service, too, when the Spaniard would have laid his yoke upon us, and told with a tongue of flame when his great Armada made the Deep yonder twinkle with myriad lights, like another heaven.'

'Ay, he would have brought back the old faith,' said Mr Stevens carelessly, but with a stealthy glance at his companion.

'I am a Catholic myself,' answered Raymond simply, 'but I would not force my creed down a nation's throat at the point of the sword. In these times, as during the late war, the beacon is only used as a telegraph. Those wooden arms, which give it, as you say, so ghastly an appearance, have a vocabulary, when made to speak, of many hundred words, which on a fine day can be heard, or rather read, miles and miles away.'

'Are there any people stationed there to work it?' inquired the stranger.

'No, not now: the wooden hut is pulled down where the semaphore men used to live, and at present I suppose it is one of the most lonely places hereabouts. From the sea, it is totally inaccessible; the cliffs everywhere are sheer; and except by the coast-guard in their night-patrol, I doubt whether it is visited once a week by any human creature. If you would like to pass by it, however, it will not take us much out of our way.'

'I should like to do so much,' replied Mr Stevens: 'I have never yet been close beside a beacon, nor even seen one before.'

'Yet hereabouts they call them See'emafores,' observed Hepburn laughing. The fresh, clear air, the rapid walk, had worked with Raymond's naturally healthy animalism, and put him in high spirits, which even the companionship of the sombre Mr Stevens could not damp.

'You are pleased to be jocular, sir,' responded that worthy; 'in our north country, such mirth is held to be a bad sign. "Against ill-chance," it is said, "men are ever merry." We call it *fie*.'

'Indeed!' responded Raymond, laughing still. 'I never knew that a poor pun was held to bring bad-luck; and yet I know the north country well too.'

'I thought you told me yesterday you were from the south,' observed the stranger gravely.

'I have lived in both north and south,' answered Raymond in some confusion. 'Now, look at those little lumps of chalk which run to and fro from the Beacon, like the outlines of some children's game. Without them, the coast-guardsman would never find his way at night; and once some cowardly scoundrels, for whom smuggler was far too good a name, arranged them after dark so that the poor wretch, thinking that he was only upon his usual beat, fell over the cliff-top.'

'And was killed, I suppose?' inquired Mr Stevens.

'Killed!—ay; if he had had nine lives, he must have lost all before he reached the bottom. Whether a man fell from yonder edge upon sea or shingle, it would matter nothing to him by the time he reached either. See! the very rabbits in the warren there have left a space between their burrows and the hideous steep, and squat at a respectful distance. The poor victim's name is carved somewhere upon the Beacon itself: yes, here it is—a more fitting record of his fate, perhaps, in such a place, than any other monument:

ABRAHAM PRICE—*perit*—

The date is already erased by the wind and weather, but the thing took place but a very few years ago.'

'But why *perit*?' inquired Mr Stevens with unwonted interest. 'That is not the Latin for "murdered," is it?'

'Well, not exactly, I believe,' laughed Raymond; 'but the fact is, the crime was never brought legally home to the wretch, although the finger of justice seemed to point him out as clearly as yonder arm is pointing to you.'

The stranger looked up in the direction indicated by his companion, then staggered back with his face pale as ashes. The long black arm of the telegraph was grimly covering him, as a musket covers its mark.

'Well, for a gentleman who entertains no silly fancies, I must say you are easily frightened,' observed Raymond with some contempt. 'Why, Marmouth Beacon is quite a scarecrow to you. I should have thought you were the murderer himself, conscience-stricken, but that I happen to know he has paid the forfeit of his crime. He was the very man I was telling you of who was shot through the head by Mr Topsell, at the second "chime" we came to. His name was Peter Elliot.—Take care where you are going to, sir, for Heaven's sake. You are standing too near the edge, unless you have a very steady eye.'

'I am never giddy from physical causes,' returned the stranger coolly, 'although, as you have been good enough to remark, some things make me nervous. Do you mean to say that a man would have no chance for his life who fell from here into deep water, when the tide was well up—as it is now, for instance?'

'Not the very slightest,' returned Raymond confidently. 'Where we are now, the cliff overhangs a little, and we can see nothing beneath us; but turn your eyes a few feet westward, and you may see in yonder precipice a counterpart of the sheer steep upon whose beetling edge we stand, so lofty that the roaring of the surf which, sycophant-like, licks the huge white wall it slowly undermines, cannot reach our ears; so smooth, that there is scarce a foothold sure upon the ledges where the sea-gulls breed, and the foolish guillemots stand in ordered line, by scores and scores.'

'Still, this very smoothness would have given the poor wretch you spoke of a greater chance; he would not at least have been dashed from rock to rock in his descent, and at the bottom there is sand, I see.'

'Nay,' returned Raymond, 'but you see no sand, and your mistake is a proof of the great height at which we stand. What looks like sand from here, so brown and small, is a beach of rounded stones, which would dash the life out of a man, though he fell but one quarter of this distance, while the next ebb-tide would bear him out to sea; and yet—'

'Ay, what? You were going to say something. You think a person even in such a strait might yet be saved?'

'Not so, sir; I was calling to mind how in this very spot I saw the bird-catchers at work last spring. No less than five were clinging to the face of that same precipice, with nothing but a rope of hide apiece to anchor them to life. I saw one being drawn up with a young fulmar—the oily gull—in either hand, striking his foot against the smooth chalk, and bounding out into the very air, as though he scorned even a foothold; and all that time he was bawling jokes to his mate upon the edge here, who merely held the hide reins, as one holds upon whose strength and presence of mind his existence solely depended. Some of these adventurers do not have a mate at all, but trust to a mere stake, which they themselves drive into the earth above, and to which they fasten their rope. The only difficulty they seem to find in the matter is at the last part of their unassisted ascent, when they have to jerk themselves from the face of the precipice, in order to insert their hand beneath the rope and the cliff-edge. No accident, indeed, happens, I believe, either bird-catching or samphire-gathering, but well has Shakespeare called it "dreadful trade."

'You interest me immensely,' said Mr Stevens ; 'for all we know, then, there may be half-a-dozen folks beneath us, whose presence we know nothing about.'

'No, not to-day,' returned Raymond ; 'the wind is far too strong for—Lord have mercy upon me ! Help, man, help ! Stain not your soul with murder !'

With one strong push between the shoulders, the treacherous stranger had thrust his companion over the cliff.

He had fallen, of course, but not sheer ; the wondrous instinct of life had somehow caused him even in that instant to twist round with his face, and not his side, towards the precipice ; and there he clung, a few feet below the edge, with his nails dug into the soft chalk, and his feet striving for, and even attaining a momentary hold.

THE ANCIENT MARINERS.

GREENWICH HOSPITAL, 'a monument,' as Macaulay truly says, 'the most superb that ever was erected to any sovereign,' is situated on the south bank of the Thames, about five miles below London Bridge. Its area, which, in the original grant of 1694, was between eight and nine acres, has been enlarged from time to time by the purchase of adjacent ground, until it now occupies upwards of forty acres. The buildings, the general plan of which was gratuitously given by Wren, were completed between 1694 and 1758. They consist of four structures—King Charles's, King William's, Queen Anne's, and Queen Mary's quarters ; and to these an infirmary, helpless ward, and other buildings, have at various times, between 1763 and 1851, been added. The chief object, according to the grant of 1694, for which this institution was established, was 'the relief and support of seamen serving on board of the ships or vessels belonging to the royal navy, who, by reason of age, wounds, or other disabilities, shall be incapable of further service at sea, and be unable to maintain themselves ;' the other objects of the institution being the maintenance of the widows, and the maintenance and education of the children of seamen happening to be slain or disabled in the sea-service. The income secured to this institution, from a variety of sources, is upwards of £140,000 per annum ; and from the nature of the functions which it was intended to discharge, it might have been thought that whatever was done in other government institutions, the income of this one at least would not be officially diverted from its legitimate purpose. But those sanguine persons who entertained hopes of this kind—hopes which the early management of the institution served to strengthen—were doomed to be disappointed, for while casting about seeking what it might devour, Jobbery scented out the Hospital with its comfortable income, and immediately marked it for its own. Offices with large pay and little work, and sinecures with large pay and no work at all, were speedily established ; and a very considerable portion of the income which should have been expended in promoting the comfort of aged and disabled seamen, and their wives and children, or the widows and fatherless children of men who have died or been killed in the naval service, was paid away in salaries to useless and unnecessary officers ; and while these officials were receiving

large annual salaries, the pensioners, the men for whom the Hospital had been built and endowed, were drawing the munificent sum of one shilling per week. Under these circumstances, it is by no means surprising that the men in the naval service began to regard the Hospital with much the same species of horror with which the respectable working-man regards the workhouse, and that applications for admission into it fell off.

In course of time, the mismanagement and jobbery in connection with the Hospital became so outrageous and rampant, that it was evident 'something must be done ;' and at last Nemesis, in the shape of a royal commission, had Jobbery on the hip, and the job promoters and their *protégés* were brought to book. The commission was appointed in November 1859, for the purpose of inquiring into 'the internal economy and management of Greenwich Hospital, and of the funds by which it is maintained ; and to report thereon ; and also whether the resources of the Hospital can be more advantageously applied for the benefit of seamen who have served in our navy.' The commissioners were Robert Ingham, Esq., Q.C. ; William Hutt, Esq. ; and James Charles Dalrymple Hay. These gentlemen performed their work of investigation in a thorough and comprehensive manner ; and though they did their condemnation, as Ariel did his spiritting, gently, the statistics, statements, and recommendations embodied in their Report, were of a startlingly condemnatory character. A single short table, taken from the bulky Report of these commissioners, affords a striking illustration of the rise and progress of sinecurism in connection with the management of this institution. In 1805, there were 2410 pensioners in the Hospital, and the yearly cost of a pensioner was £27, 10s. 9½d. ; and in that year the cost of the management of the establishment was £21,837, 12s. 11½d. In 1859, the number of pensioners in the Hospital was 1676, the cost of each pensioner £26, 10s. 9½d., and the cost of the management £48,667, 7s. 10d. So that, as the commissioners very neatly put it, it would appear 'that whilst the expense of the individual pensioner has not been increased during fifty-five years, and whilst the aggregate number of pensioners has been diminished by thirty per cent, the cost of the establishment has considerably more than doubled.'

And while the funds of the Hospital were being thus consumed in the 'management' of the establishment, there were, as we learn from an elaborate 'Return of the Number, Ages, and Length of Service of Seamen who have served in the Royal Navy in receipt (13th February 1860) of Indoor and Outdoor Relief in the Unions of England and Wales,' 1130 men who had served in the royal navy in receipt of parochial relief, 723 of them being inmates of various workhouses, the remaining 407 receiving outdoor relief. One of these men had been fifty-five, another fifty-three, and another fifty years in the service, and many of them had served twenty, thirty, and forty years. Several of them had been at Trafalgar, one of them having been on board the *Victory* in that great battle ; and some of them, who were probably in their second childhood, were set down in the return as having served many years, but did not know how long. While these men, whose best years had been spent in assisting to maintain the naval supremacy of England, were in the degraded position of paupers, there was in the Hospital, to the

maintenance of which they had out of their scanty pay contributed during the many years of their service, accommodation for nearly 700 additional inmates, and many thousand pounds of its annual income were jobbed away. The commissioners made an uncompromising exposure of the more prominent abuses in connection with the management of the Hospital, and the general result of their labours was highly satisfactory. The salaries of the overpaid officials were considerably reduced; some of the more prominent sinecures were abolished; and a decided and practical improvement was effected in the condition of the pensioners. They (the pensioners) were divided into three classes, according to the rank which they had held when in the service; their pay was raised from one shilling to three, four, or five shillings per week, according to their class; and the modern 'billy-cock' was substituted for the cocked-hat (the other portions of their original uniform had been modernised some years before), which often drew juvenile attention of an unpleasant nature upon its wearers. But though the commission of 1859-60 was productive of much good, it could scarcely be expected that a single commission would altogether remedy or eradicate the accumulated abuses of fifty years; and there still remains much room for improvement in the management of Greenwich Hospital.

The Hospital is capable of affording accommodation to 2352 pensioners, but the number residing in it is generally under 1600, and that is about the number at present receiving the benefits of the institution. Of the pensioners now occupying the Hospital, about one-half have been marines, and though there are still a few old-salts who cannot be brought to acknowledge that a marine is as good as 'a blue-jacket,' the general body of the pensioners live in the utmost good-fellowship.

Although the mismanagement in connection with the funds of this noble institution has been the cause of many old veterans who should have found in the Hospital a haven for their declining years, lingering out the last years of their lives in workhouses, it has not tended to lessen the personal comforts of the inmates. Their uniform is a warm and comfortable one, and there is now nothing grotesque or charity-like in its appearance. Their rations are good in quality, and abundant in quantity, and are sufficiently varied to avoid causing that feeling of satiety which the too continuous use of any particular article of food creates. Cleanliness of the most scrupulous character reigns supreme in all departments of the Hospital; and the sick-wards, in addition to an efficient staff of medical and sick attendants, are replete with special conveniences for invalids and convalescents. The grounds of the Hospital are tolerably extensive, and are kept in beautiful order; and here such of the pensioners as, from their age or infirmities, are unable to undergo any considerable degree of exertion, spend a great portion of each day during fine weather. The seats under the colonnades that run round various parts of the buildings, and the walk immediately facing the river, are the parts of the grounds most frequented by the pensioners; and as you see the old fellows quietly dozing under the colonnades, or commenting, in a weak piping voice, on 'the build' of some Dutchman or Russian which is being towed up or down the river, you wonder within your own mind if these feeble, trembling old men could really have been the brave, stalwart,

picturesque blue-jackets who once manned the ships of the most powerful navy in the world.

The life of the inmates of an institution like Greenwich Hospital is necessarily of a somewhat monastic character, but as the time of the pensioners is in a great measure at their own disposal, the more robust portion of the pensioners do not find their life so dull as might be expected. They can mix with the inhabitants of the town, and stroll into the park and on to Blackheath, or, failing other means of killing time, they can watch the movements of the 'swells' who are disporting themselves on the balconies of *The Trafalgar* or *The Ship*. The men have to be in the hospital by ten o'clock at night; but no well-conducted pensioner experiences any difficulty in occasionally obtaining leave of absence till a later hour; many of them avail themselves of this privilege to pay an occasional visit to the theatre and other places of amusement; and no juvenile who witnessed it enjoyed the pantomime of *Jack the Giant-killer*, which was produced at the Greenwich Theatre last Christmas, more heartily than did the old pensioners.

It is only reasonable to suppose that the dramatic tar, who garnishes his conversation with frequent allusions to his lee scuppers and his larboard fin, describes the virtuous maiden of the play as a tight-built little frigate, and with his single arm defeats 'the pirate horde,' or causes the retinues of 'the ruthless baron' to 'sheer off,' had originally some foundation in fact; and in the days when 'our ships were British oak,' and the old sea-lions who had fought and conquered under Nelson and Howe were the principal inhabitants of the hospital, the Greenwich pensioner may have had some resemblance to the ideal yarn-spinning, grog-drinking, timber-shivering ancient mariner that many persons still imagine him to be. But the Nelson-school of man-of-war's-men have passed away; and many of the men who succeeded them, 'Lord bless you, sir, have no story to tell'; while those who can tell of hair-breadth 'scapes and moving accidents by flood and field, do not care about gratifying those persons who enter into conversation with them merely to get a yarn; though, among friends, and when the subject is incidental to or arises from the passing conversation of the friendly circle, the brave old veterans will willingly fight their battles o'er again: for the time being, they rise superior to the infirmities of age; their pale wrinkled faces glow with excitement; a bright courageous glance flashes from their age-dimmed eyes; their weak shaking voices become strong and stern; their 'sinews bear them stiffly up'; and the staff which ordinarily supports their tottering footsteps, is brought to the charge as a bayonet, or flourished over their heads as a cutlass, as they tell you how they charged 'like a wall' right through the ranks of an overwhelming force of the enemy, or took part in some murderous 'cutting-out.' Some of them who served under Sir De Lacy Evans throughout the Spanish campaign against Don Carlos, will tell you in graphic language how the raw recruits from England, who, owing to the exigencies of the recruiting service of that day, were in position and appearance little better than Falstaff's ragged regiment, were taken from the vessel that brought them to Spain, had muskets placed in their hands, and without waiting for uniforms, were at once led into action, and behaved with all the courage, if not all the steadiness, of

veterans. They will tell you how the blue-jackets, who were brought on shore to support the marines, hunted out Don Carlos's sharp-shooters with as much gusto as ever a sportsman coursed hare—how the same blue-jackets insisted upon carrying their union-jack into action, and how, when their beloved ‘bunting’ was in danger, each man fought around it with a dauntless courage worthy of the knightly standard-bearers of the days of chivalry. They will tell you of the affair of the 16th of March 1837—for which the Spanish cross was given to the British soldiers engaged—in which, after they had been deserted by their Spanish allies, the British sustained a day’s hard fighting against a superior force, and were just congratulating themselves on having been able to hold their own, when Don Carlos’s army was largely reinforced, and they, the British, were at the same time informed that a strong force of cavalry was approaching to cut off their retreat in the rear. Exhausted by the day’s fighting, and threatened in front and in rear by superior forces, it seemed, as the pensioners express it, a cold morning for them. A hasty consultation was held by the British officers, and it was agreed that the only chance of avoiding surrender was to break the ranks of the enemy, who were preparing to charge them in front, and retreat before they could re-form to renew the attack. In order to carry out this movement, the handful of British troops were stationed on the brow of a piece of gently rising-ground, to await the attack of the enemy, who were now advancing with fixed bayonets. Men soon began to fall under the fire of the advancing troops, but no attempt was made to return their fire until they were near the summit of the rising-ground on which the British were stationed, and then a close and deadly volley was poured into their ranks, and the word being given to charge, the British troops, with a ringing British cheer, swept down upon the already staggering ranks of their foe, whom they threw into a state of confusion, from which they did not recover in time to offer any opposition to the orderly retreat of the British force, which fell back upon St Sebastian.

There is one old seaman, who was in action with Lord Howe, who may be seen on any fine day walking about the grounds of the Hospital or the streets of Greenwich; but the majority of the pensioners who were in the service more than thirty years ago, are in the sick or helpless wards of the Hospital; and the active-service experience of those who were in the service later than 1830 has been mostly derived from the various wars in China and the Crimean war—after which latter war, a considerable number of comparatively young men, who had been disabled in the course of the war, claimed and obtained the benefits of the Hospital.

Though the pensioners are in a general way reserved with strangers, the seeker of stories who goes among them need not despair, as among the inmates of the Hospital are several of a humorous and imaginative turn of mind, who will furnish them with an unlimited number of yarns, of a toughness that will severely test the mental digestion of the most ardent admirer of romance. One old fellow, who never took part in any more dangerous service than the firing of a salute, is regarded by his companions as a veritable Münchhausen, and it is a standing joke with them to say that he has

been treated to more grog, in return for his yarns, than would float a man-of-war. The imagination of this old fellow is of the most vivid and exhaustless character; and had he been sufficiently educated to clothe his ideas in ‘fine English,’ the sensation-novelists would in him have found a dangerous rival near their throne. Like them, he occasionally neglects the unities, but then, he is even more marvellously full of melodramatic incident; and thus when, in telling ‘the story of his life from year to year,’ he makes himself out to be hundred and forty years old, that slight inaccuracy is seldom noticed amid the warlike glare with which he surrounds his story.

A barber’s shop near the Hospital, kept by an old marine who has seen twenty-two years’ service, and where a daily newspaper is taken in, is a favourite resort of many of the most intelligent of the pensioners, who meet there to read, or hear read, the newspaper, and discuss such portions of its contents as may interest them, and these discussions generally take an illustrative form. In this shop, we have (after the morning paper had been read) taken part in the various cruises of the *Sumter* and *Alabama*, and fought the latter gallant vessel until her guns were under water. Here, too, the sanded floor serving for blank chart whereon to line out the various tackings of the slow-sailing, wind-delayed *Victoria*, we traced day by day the Cain-like flight of Miller; and here we have upon a great number of occasions run the blockade, dashing through the blockading squadron in brilliant style; and on one occasion—the pensioner of the strong imagination being present—sunk two Federal ironclads that attempted to intercept us.

A favourite topic of conversation with the pensioners is the characters of their old commanders, compared with some of whom it would appear, from what the pensioners say of them, that Old Bill Barley was a particularly patient, civil, and considerate gentleman, while others were as kind-hearted as the great Captain Ed’rd Cuttle. Some of these commanders still hold a conspicuous position in the Navy List, while others have long since shuffled off this mortal coil, and are safely anchored in that universal harbour to which all human craft must come. But the evil that men do lives after them; and in the case of these naval commanders, the good which some of them have done has not been buried with their bones. The unbidden tear will often rise to the dim eyes of the old seamen, as they speak in tones of reverential affection of some of those brave, generous-hearted English gentlemen, who were at once the commander and the friend of their crew. They tell how these good men, some of whom had been midshipmen and lieutenants in Nelson’s Trafalgar fleet, substituted the kind though firm admonition for the degrading lash—how they sent sick Jack little delicacies from their own table—gave Jack when in port a good share of liberty, and trusted more to his manliness and sense of honour than to his fear of punishment, for maintaining the discipline of their ships. But

The flush of rage
O’ercomes the ashen hue of age

on the cheeks of the old men, when they tell—as they often do when recalling the incidents of the time when they ‘served’—of brave men lashed to the gratings, and flogged like dogs, or of weak and defenceless boys treated with inhuman cruelty, by

order of some brutal, drunken, incompetent ruffian, who had obtained the command of a man-of-war's-man by family or some other 'outside' influence. Their tone then is one of bitter hatred; they curse both loudly and deeply the memory of the tyrannical commanders, and confidently assert that such of them as have gone the way of all flesh, are now resident in the very warmest corner of a very warm place, and that the Prince of that warm country will not have had his due until sundry old gentlemen, at present on the half-pay list of the navy, have been consigned to him.

The only characteristic that seems to be incidental alike to the sailor of the novel and stage and the sailor of real life, is that spirit of simple, generous, reckless Jack-ashorism which marks the British seaman, and age has not extinguished that spirit in the old pensioners. In the old Jack of the Hospital there is still a good deal of the young Jack-ashore. Old Jack is as simple and open-hearted as a child; he still retains his partiality for grog, and will yet occasionally get three sheets in the wind, or half-seas over; and so long as he has the wherewithal to do it, he is always ready to 'stand a glass.' He is imposed upon with the greatest ease, and will bestow coppers upon, and believe implicitly and sympathisingly in the tales of the most palpably-professional mendicant, and will even allow himself to be duped by transparently sham-sailors. He is still an enthusiastic admirer of the fair sex, and is constantly investing spare pence in the purchase of doggerel street-ballads, which recount the love-adventures of 'sailor-boys' and black-eyed sa-li-ors. But nothing shews the Jack-ashore spirit more pointedly than the relish with which old Jack will tell of his sprees on shore during the time that he served; and if left to select his own subject of conversation, he will always speak of his land experiences in preference to his adventures at sea.

Of the Bill relating to Greenwich Hospital (by which it is proposed to retain the Hospital for sick men only, and make all others out-pensioners), at present before parliament, the pensioners as a body entertain the most unfavourable opinion. Under the present system, pensioners who are married may become out-pensioners; but no amount of out-pension which is likely to be given to these men will enable men who are unable to work, and who have neither wives nor friends to aid them in eking out a subsistence, to live with anything like the degree of comfort in which they live in the Hospital. Nor are the objections founded upon purely personal considerations the only ones the pensioners make against this Bill. It is, they assert, nothing more or less than a 'wrapped-up' job. Under the present system of enlistment, they argue, very few men become entitled to pensions; and hence, as the men whom it is proposed to make *out* instead of *in* pensioners, die off, a considerable portion of the money granted for paying the out-pensions would revert to the managers of the pension fund; and the money thus reverting to government officials, the pensioners do not hesitate to say would inevitably be jobbed away. Whether or not the views entertained by the pensioners on this subject are just, we are not sufficiently well versed in naval and political matters to decide; they are probably prejudiced or extreme; however, when the past management, or rather mismanagement, of the Hospital is taken into consideration, they are cer-

tainly not altogether unwarrantable; and, right or wrong, they are the views entertained by a large majority of the body of pensioners at present residing in the Hospital.

A GRASS-FIRE ADVENTURE.

THREE different fires, from as many quarters, were reddening the evening sky, as I and my two brother-officers, and the detachment of soldiers under our command, looked forth from our solitary little outpost on the banks of the Great Fish River.

Within the last few days, the Caffres had burst in force upon the colony, marking their track by fire and assagai; the company of Cape Mounted Rifles, who completed our slender garrison, had been sent to the colonists' aid, while we infantry, as being unfit for such duty, were left to hold the post. But our hearts were with our suffering countrymen; and it was not until those war-like flames had died away, and the patrol had returned from its midnight round, that we committed our little citadel to its sentinels' charge, and retired to our barracks, which, built in a hollow square, formed also the post's outer wall, its only additional defence being a row of palisades.

Yet no apprehension for our own safety troubled even the faintest-hearted woman within the gate; and we could scarcely believe our senses when, shortly after, we were awakened by the harsh shriek of the Caffre war-cry, and rushing out, found ourselves beset by a horde of skin-clad warriors, who, concealed by the darkness, had crept, snake-like, along the ground, until, when close at hand, they had bounded to their feet, and with quivering assagais, and discordant yells, thrown themselves against our defences, hoping to carry them by surprise.

Failing in this design, they fled, though only, as it proved, beyond rifle-range; for daylight revealed us girt round by a belt of foes outnumbering us by twenty to one. At once we divined the truth, that our assailant was some border-chief, who, during friendly visits to the post, had detected its weak points, especially that worst and greatest, the want of water, all we used being brought from a neighbouring ravine, between which and us the Caffres clustered thickest. It was soon evident they had decided not again to attack the post, but resting on their arms, to await the time when we should either perish of thirst within our walls, or fall by their assagais without.

There was indeed but little hope it would be otherwise. There were none among those lonely hills to bear to Graham's Town the tidings of the siege, and days would elapse ere our next mail was due. Our only chance, and that a faint one, was, that some inadvertence of the Caffres might enable one man to steal through their lines, and hasten in quest of aid. As senior subaltern, I claimed this duty; but so closely were we invested, that I almost despaired of ever executing it.

With unspeakable anxiety, we watched, while our small stock of water waxed hourly lower. Despite our utmost care, it was all but gone, when, on the third night, a brilliant meteor, darting across the sky, was overtaken by a second, which appeared to the eye to shatter it into atoms. A shout of

triumph from the besiegers greeted this infallible omen of success ; and in further demonstration of joy, dancing and music soon filled the Caffre camp, hundreds of feet beating time vehemently to their owners' guttural strains, while the winding of buffalo-horns and booming of calabash-drums swelled the whole into a deafening din.

Here was the long-sought opportunity ; and followed by the good wishes of my companions, I started on my hazardous enterprise ; bending almost double as I crept cautiously on from the cover of one hillock to another, when some fire flashed brighter across my way, or group drew unusually near, sinking to the earth with bated breath, yet ever seeking for some unguarded spot by which I might pass out. But it was not until many a danger had been narrowly escaped that a break was found in the living cordon, and still gliding on between the ridges, I left the Caffre circle behind, and rejoiced to find myself free to seek for my comrades' help and rescue.

Our stables and horses were in the Caffres' possession ; but a few miles distant was a spot where the spare Cape corps horses pastured, and thither I hastened in quest of one. Catching the most powerful among them, I speedily equipped him with a bridle and rug-saddle, brought wrapped round me from the post on purpose ; then mounting, I took the way to Graham's Town, as a measure of prudence, avoiding the path across the hills, and travelling through labyrinths of intersecting ravines and valleys.

This route considerably increased the distance, but well my new steed served me, threading devious breaks in the thorny jungle, fording rushing water-courses, and pushing through steep rocky defiles, where a single false step would have cost our lives, until, ere four hours were elapsed, nearly half our journey was accomplished. My hopes of success were assuming certainty, when some indistinct sound seemed to mingle with the echo of my horse's footfall, and in dread of lurking Caffres, I spurred on faster. But the sound soon swelled into a dreary howl, and then a loud burst of hysterical laughter, and looking round, I beheld, through the darkness, two fiery orbs, and at once knew that a hyena, that dangerous and wily brigand of the woods, was on our track.

There was no longer need of spur or rein, for, conscious of his danger, my steed bounded fleetly on, but, fresh from his lair, the wild beast's pace was swifter, and each minute he seemed to gain upon us. I did my utmost to scare him off by shouts and yells, and, at the risk of arousing the Caffres, I fired my pistols, but all in vain ; unhurt, undismayed, and resolute, our pursuer still held his way.

Suddenly, a second voice joined in chorus, and two more flaming eyes glared on the night. Another hyena had joined the chase, and, to my consternation, I perceived that our peril was more than doubled, for the presence of each other seemed to animate the fierce creatures to yet stronger efforts. I knew that lonely travellers had often been similarly beset ; and the remembrance of their adventures was far from cheering. Meanwhile, shrill neighs of terror burst from my horse's lips, as he still plunged madly on ; momentarily, more audible grew the headlong rush of the hyenas through the tangled grass, while their reiterated cries rang in our ears like peals of mocking laughter.

It was a race for life or death, and the odds were evidently against us. Nearer and nearer drew our fell followers, as they strove to outstrip each other ; nearer and nearer, yelling, howling, laughing at our heels, as if we had been demon-chased.

At length, with a longer bound, and higher leap, the foremost sprang to my horse's haunches, holding on by his enormous claws, and, quick as thought, his companion followed. A loud, wild shriek, quivering through the woods, told the poor creature's agony, as wayspent, wounded, and overpowered, he fell heavily to the ground, his inexorable foes still clinging to their prey, and rolling in fierce struggles over him, while, with a thrill of inexpressible horror, I found myself sharing the general downfall.

For a moment I lay stunned and half insensible, helplessly awaiting my expected doom ; but in another, to my infinite amazement, I discovered that I had been thrown to some distance by the shock ; and rising, found myself not only unhurt, but in no immediate danger, the hyenas having neither eyes nor ears save for the victim whose blood they had tasted. It was a horrible scene, and I hastened to terminate it by a brace of bullets. My hapless steed's last breath ebbed as I released him ; and with sincere regret for his fate, yet duly and truly thankful for my own unhoped-for escape, I turned away to hasten on my important journey.

But travelling on foot, I made dishearteningly little progress. The valleys, too, generally lay at angles with my route ; and whenever I was compelled to cross the shoulder of a hill, or corner of a plateau, some blackened ruin or abandoned weapon was sure to meet my view, impressing the continual necessity of caution. Thus it was past mid-day, and I was still some miles from Graham's Town, when, rounding a rocky ledge, I came suddenly in sight of a large body of Caffres, encamped in the valley below. Some expedition was apparently at hand, for each man was sharpening his assagai, or looking to the flint-lock of his rifle ; while in the midst, clad in a leopard-skin karosse, and vehemently haranguing his countrymen, was the well-known chief Tyalie, whilom the frequenter of mess and ball-room, but now the colonists' most bitter enemy.

In all haste, I retreated, but unfortunately not unseen ; for instantly the whole force rose in hot pursuit, while a hue-and-cry rolled up the hill, which awakened a hundred echoes. But it was nothing to the outburst of baffled rage with which, on reaching the summit, the Caffres found that, comparatively fleet of foot, I had escaped to the hill beyond. Rifles and assagais were freely discharged across the intervening ravine, but the bullets fell wide, the flying spears short ; ponderous knobkerries whirled and whistled through the air, yet with a like ill-success ; and then, as if exasperated by failure, rose a deep fiendish howl, heralding a second flight of assagais, and no words can express the extent of my dismay to perceive that each shaft was tipped with fire, an unerring indication that the most fearful device of Caffre warfare was about to be put into execution against me.

Fanned by their swift passage through the air, the spears came quivering down like fiery serpents but a few yards from me. The long prairie-grass, dried almost to tinder by the tropical sun, smoked and crackled beneath their glowing trail ; and in

another moment a dozen fires were sparkling and leaping along the ground, raising an impassable barrier between me and my pursuers, but, at the same time, menacing me with a fate more terrible than any their weapons could inflict, and before which even the peril of the past night grew faint and dim. I had but one resource—to turn and flee before this incombatible foe ; but when gaining the ascent, I gave a momentary glance behind, I was well-nigh appalled, for the conflagration had already spread and stretched into a wide field of flames, reddening the steep hillsides, devastating the ravine to its central stream, and rushing on my track like a fiery tide. The whole wilds on my side of the valley would shortly be ablaze with one of those terrific grass-fires which in that dry climate a single spark will suffice to kindle, and which, taller than a man, rage unchecked and uncheckable over vast tracts of country. All I could do was again to flee ; but my breathless race was no more for life, but to delay the death no human effort could finally avert. It was a frightful doom to anticipate ; and as I still toiled through the cumbrous grass, visions of my distant home and its loved inmates, thoughts of the beleaguered comrades whose fate would be scarce less miserable than mine, pressed on me with inexpressible distress and pain.

Meanwhile, stronger, louder, and fiercer, the mighty conflagration swept on, running in fiery streams along the parched-up herbage, igniting the thickets, exploding in volleys of sparks from out the brushwood, and rolling along in thick clouds of smoke. Quaggas, antelopes, hares, nay, even snakes and lizards, fled before its scorching breath, and, despairing and weary, I followed in their rear. Suddenly, through the circling smoke, I perceived one of those strange, crater-like mounds of rock so frequent in the African wilds. Could I but gain its shelter, my case might be less desperate ; and with renewed energy, I strove to reach it ; but my strength was almost gone : my breath came fast, and my feet faltered in their eager course, while the flames rolled after me with redoubled speed, and more than once I felt as if I must yet sink to the earth, and yield passively to the fate whose only consolation was, that it would be brief as terrible. No words can tell the intense suspense of those few minutes—the swift rushing blasts of heated air, the swelling tumults of the following surges, telling how near grew the destroyer, while yet far ahead was the little ark in which there might be safety. At length, just as the flames touched my heels, I gained its base ; to scramble up the rugged ascent was the work of a moment, then, panting and prayerful, I sank down in its shallow basin, as I hoped, saved.

And so it proved. The fire swept and surged around the stony islet, scathing its guardian aloes, devouring the sparse herbage in its interstices, and almost suffocating me with its dense masses of smoke, then passed on its devastating career until it should be stopped by some interposing stream. Ere long, the denuded ground cooled sufficiently, and descending from the mound, I soon reached Graham's Town, whose rampart of rocky hills protected it from danger. The following night, I formed one of the five hundred men who relieved the besieged outpost, and escorted its inmates back to safety, lighted on our way by the Caffre-lit flames of our recent home and of all our worldly

goods. Many, since then, have been the perils of my military life, but none recall a more thrilling memory than those of the journey ending with that Grass-fire Adventure.

P A L E S T I N E.

Voices on the sandy shore
Overlooked by Lebanon,
Fifteen hundred miles or more
Nearer to the rising sun—
I have heard your broken flow,
Like the leaves of olive groves,
Where the soft winds come and go,
Rustling round their wild blue doves.

High above the lonely tent,
Heaven spreads its lustrous lights,
Here on deep-blue waters leant,
There on swelling mountain-heights.

Far away are cities vast,
Restless rivers traffic-stirred,
Roar of streets, where loud and fast
Rumour groups the passing herd.

Brain and hand in rapid life
Far away the nations wake ;
Ever, or for peace or strife,
Labour's heavy engines shake.

Here the yellow sands conceal
Zidon's long-forgotten roads,
And the creaking of the wheel
Never nears her lost abodes ;

Here alone the breast o'erflis
With the past, for men who roam
Under you eternal hills
Through a people's ruined home.

We upon the present's tide
Far away must ply the oar,
Where the Unforeseen may guide,
Passing on from more to more.

Nor for ever thus shall stray
Travellers on thy magic strand,
Nurse of Him whose glorious day
Lit the earth from land to land.

Years, alas ! are yoked for thee,
Doomed to drive their mighty share
Through the scenes where rock and tree
Still Apostle's witness bear.

Not again will Zion know
The Saviour's foot, the Saviour's voice ;
Faintlier coloured ever grow
Times that were the Saviour's choice.

Not again will mortal sight
Look upon Him till the Day
Send its swift long stream of light,
And the world dissolve away.

Even so—yet sweetly sound
Voices from the rising sun,
From the shore whose shadowy bound
Is the lofty Lebanon.

Whatsoever else rejoice,
This will still my heart command,
Murmurs of the Traveller's voice *
Wafted o'er from Holy Land.

* Written after reading *The Land and the Book*.